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SUBJECT: HOW THE SOUTH WAS WON - TALLYING UP ELECTION DAY FRAUD

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: For perspective on potential problems in upcoming provincial council elections, REO Staff spoke to representatives of the South Central Iraqi National Accord (INA), Communist Party, Iraqi Election Commission (IECI), and other contacts about ballot tampering and other forms of voter manipulation that were alleged to occur during last year's January 2 provincial council elections, October constitutional referendum, and December 15 Council of Representatives CoR elections. Contacts claimed that while the provincial IECI heads and professional staff were in general trustworthy, temporary election workers engaged in widespread vote tampering. Moderate party officials detailed the alleged methods in which the "555" (aka "candle") United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) religious party slate applied social coercion, allegedly violated election campaigning regulations, and changed vote tallies. END SUMMARY

Background: Secure Elections and Robust Participation

¶2. (C) The three national elections held since the fall of Saddam Hussein were undoubtedly a significant accomplishment, given a daunting security challenge and the difficulties in organizing free and fair elections in a war torn country without proper infrastructure. Elections were further complicated by the challenges of training staff outside the country and the lack of international observers during the election themselves.

¶3. (C) Despite the obstacles, the January, 2005 Transitional National Assembly (TNA) and Provincial Council elections, the October, 2005 constitutional referendum, and the December, 2005 Council of Representatives (CoR) elections were generally judged to be successful by two important criteria; overall turnout (58% - 72%) and a moderate incidence of election day violence. However, REO contacts in the moderate and secular parties continue to insist that January and December majority victories in the South Central region for the "555" Shi'a religious party slate were turned into landslide victories by UIA dirty tricks and ballot fraud. To this day, Iraqi National Accord (INA) and Communist Party contacts insist that this fraud occurred throughout the region and was pervasive enough to serve as grounds for determining that the TNA/PC and CoR elections were not free and fair.

¶4. (C) While REO staff lack the data to rigorously evaluate the scale and frequency of voter fraud by UIA partisans, we do believe that the descriptions of how fraud was committed are

credible. As a reference for upcoming provincial elections, REO staff spoke with representatives from moderate parties, journalists, Iraqi Election Commission provincial heads, and other contacts to compile a partial listing of the many types of voter fraud that are alleged to have been used.

Pre-Election: Violence, Red Tape, and Social Coercion

¶5. (C) Moderate party complaints about an unequal playing field in the weeks leading up to elections fell into two categories; assassination and intimidation, and restrictions on disseminating campaign materials.

¶6. (C) Specifics were lacking on allegations of assassination. Overall, the INA slate reportedly had thirteen party workers killed during voting for the CoR. Allawi supporters and Communist Party contacts stated that they were unable to recruit candidates and field election observers because of widespread intimidation. Communist Party contacts in Babil Province stated that the night before CoR elections, the campaign posters on their Hillah headquarters were torn off the walls by a mob. A Karbala INA politician claimed that on two occasions, his poster hangers and militia members exchanged gunfire. He also reported that party offices had been attacked and trashed by mobs. A Communist Party member related how in the important Mahmoudiya district in Babil Province, leaflets were distributed door-to-door that warned people to vote "Iraqiya," (the "555" slate). The leaflets were ominously signed by the "Fair Punishment Committee."

¶7. (C) Our contacts noted that they frequently had difficulty receiving permission to post campaign materials. The Karbala INA politician noted that some municipalities would encourage the religious parties to hang banners and posters, but refused to grant permission to secular parties.

¶8. (C) Moderate parties complained about the pervasive integration of church and state that created an atmosphere of

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social coercion. For example, during the final week, mosques throughout the South Central region frequently used their loudspeakers to broadcast the message that if you vote for the "555" slate, under Islamic law, you would not be able to sleep with your wife. Another commonly broadcast message, "If you do not vote UIA, you are a Baathist." INA and Communist Party contacts noted that UIA campaign materials commonly used religious imagery.

¶9. (C) While not an illegal advantage, many moderate contacts in the South Central region have complained about the proliferation of religious satellite television channels that allow religious parties to target families within the home. Satellite broadcasting and mosques loudspeakers create a sizable media advantage, they complain. They also noted that UIA media outlets broke a mandatory 24-hour period of silence before the election to spread news about the famous Al-Jazeera television program that was said to be insulting to Ayatollah Sistani.

¶10. (C) Perhaps the most serious allegation made about pre-election day tampering concerned IECI voter registration rolls. "Tamper-proof" voter lists were compiled and printed in secure facilities outside of Iraq. Our contacts claim that the lists were never secure and had been seriously compromised before printing. Over and over again, books contained the same mocking phrase in Arabic inserted into voter lists, "Die American dogs." COMMENT: REO has digital photos of this Arabic phrase appearing in registration books. END COMMENT

Election Day: Multiple Voting, Ballot Tampering

¶11. (C) Social coercion intensified on election day, according to our contacts. Loudspeakers broadcast, "Sistani calls you to vote." "Fake sheikhs" or clerics stood in the approaches to

polling stations, stamping people's hands with the slogan "From Sistani" (a reference to Shi'a Ayatollah Ali Sistani). A mid-ranking Babil Province police officer, himself from a rural village, who had been in charge of security in Babil rural districts during the December 15 election, recalled how rural voters in village after village seemed to believe that the marjaya'iya (Shi'a clerics) had directed them to vote for a religious party. COMMENT: Ayatollah Sistani did not endorse specific candidates or parties before the CoR elections. However, his fatwas urging Shi'a to vote were often taken as an admonition to vote for a religious party. The religious parties, particularly the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) frequently invoked Sistani's name. END COMMENT

¶12. (C) Municipalities also seemed to selectively restrain movement. Communist Party representatives related how one field worker had called in, saying that the religious parties were shuttling voters to the polls in ten buses, but he was not allowed to drive down the street in his car. A Mayor of a southern Babil Province town allegedly issued an order forbidding the issuance of gas to secular party vehicles. Other contacts noted that the religious parties were allowed to hang posters inside polling stations, a privilege not granted to secular parties.

¶13. (C) Provincial Council members and high-ranking provincial officials appeared to frequently cross the line between campaigning and inappropriate influence. A Communist Party contact noted how in the sixteen districts he supervised, civil service provincial department heads fanned out with their bodyguards to direct voters to vote for the UIA. Allegedly, several PC members sat in larger polling stations all day, reminding people standing in line to vote for the "555" slate.

¶14. (C) All contacts, including two IECI provincial directors (reftel), agreed that while provincial heads and UN-trained staff were generally reliable, temporary election workers were either religious party operatives or highly susceptible to outside pressure. This seemed to be a serious problem in rural villages.

¶15. (C) Contacts outlined many types of balloting infractions and fraud allegedly carried out or facilitated by local polling station workers. These include:

-- Multiple voting at larger polling stations that had put voting booths into several separate rooms. Electoral workers would stand by and do nothing while religious party representatives took voters who had just completed voting and put them into a line for a ballot station in another room so they could vote again.

-- Voting for illiterate elderly (a significant chunk of the electorate, particularly in rural areas) and often for their family members as well.

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-- Using removable ink to mark fingers. (Contacts also complained that the official, supposedly indelible, ink was also easily removable).

-- Closing polling places early in urban districts despite a last-minute IECI order of a one-hour extension. Some polling places closed at 1730, 30 minutes before the scheduled closing time.

-- Closing the doors and asking voters who they intended to vote for. If the answer was the UIA, the voters were let in. If the answer was for a moderate party, the voter was told that the polling place was closed.

-- Taking a single vote by a member of a household and marking additional ballots for all other members of that household.

-- Forcing moderate or secular party observers to leave polling stations or asking the police to remove them.

-- Overruling observers' objections and allowing out-of-district voters to vote.

Post-Election: Ballot Stuffing and Rejecting Valid Ballots

¶16. (C) The most significant form of ballot tampering seemed to be "double-checking" of ballots. Contacts complained that throughout the region, it was common for electoral workers to open ballot boxes and mark those ballots cast for moderate parties twice, rendering that ballot invalid. The Karbala Allawi party head stated with frustration that his observers had called in 93,000 votes in the province. After the ballots were counted, the official count was only 36,000. A Babil contact noted that the IECI initial tally of moderate party votes in his Babil district was 1400. The final count announced in Baghdad was only 800.

¶17. (C) There appears to have been some ballot-stuffing. A Communist Party representative accused the UIA of importing ballot boxes pre-stuffed with ballots from Iran. They also noted accusations that Iranian Shi'a were issued Iraqi ration cards and told to cross the border into Basra and vote. More reliably, there were some rural villages in the South Central region where the final number of ballots cast significantly exceeded the number of voters registered in the electorate rolls. The Communist Party in Babil plausibly claims that left-over ballots in some areas were marked with "555" votes by IECI workers and put into ballot boxes before transfer to Baghdad.

¶18. (C) REO local staff recall telephone calls from moderate and secular party observers who had been tossed out of polling stations just after voting ended, but before ballot tallying. Journalists here relate stories about how boxes of ballots were taken away for two hours and then brought back to the polling place. During elections, the national media reported some cases of discarded ballots, largely in Baghdad and northern Iraq.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned, Lessons for the Future

¶19. (C) Different set of contacts draw different conclusions from anecdotal evidence outlining the above patterns of fraud. All concur that even if the IECI and international community had concluded that election fraud was widespread enough to warrant discounting the results, ultimately, only the margin of victory by the "555" slate would have changed in South Central. However, they charge that if fraud had been restrained, moderate parties today would have a much more active voice on both the national and local levels.

¶20. (C) Moderate party officials here conclude that the fraud they saw during the elections points out the need to push for international observers in the next election. An INA contact told us that the ratio of "555"-affiliated observers to moderate party poll workers was roughly 20:1. Intimidation makes it difficult to recruit poll watchers, he commented, adding that the presence of international observers would encourage ordinary Iraqis to participate. COMMENT: No one has an answer as to how security could be put in place for international observers. END COMMENT

¶21. (C) The IECI provincial heads in Diwaniyah and Wasit agreed with political party contacts that temporary workers were a serious problem in the 2005 elections. They argue that the IECI should retain its UN-trained core staff, and the CoR should refrain from replacing commissioners and line staff with political party operatives (reftel). On the provincial level, they see more training for temporary workers as a useful investment in raising consciousness about what poll workers can and cannot do. They also suggest that training and orientation

for Iraqi observers be expanded prior to the next election.

¶22. (C) Our moderate political contacts are more inclined to throw out the existing IECI altogether, instead tasking the judiciary sector to oversee elections. They agree with IECI professional staff that the current attempt by the CoR to revamp the IECI is a charade aimed at bringing the institution under direct political party control.

¶23. (C) All of our moderate and secular contacts would prefer to see more, not less UN involvement with the next set of national elections. They warn that SCIRI provincial leaders are increasingly insecure about holding onto majority control of provincial councils and governorships, given their acute lack of tangible success in providing basic services in their communities. They also (optimistically) believe that the marjaya'iya will likely clearly announce that they stand aside from the religious parties, and hope that regardless of where Sistani stands, voters will be more willing to consider the moderate/secular party alternative. This, they conclude, may provoke an even-higher probability of fraud and violence in the elections to come.

¶24. (C) COMMENT: With serious CoR debate beginning about the shape of elections to come, this may be an opportune time to consider modifications to the by-laws that could strengthen security and diversity in voting. For example: 1) "rolling" elections that would occur sequentially by province(s), making the most of limited international observers and helping to concentrate security; 2) electronic voting; 3) stepping up, not diminishing UN involvement; 4) more programs to combat what one contact here termed "pervasive civic illiteracy." END COMMENT
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